

INDIGENOUS RIGHTS AND OUR APPROACH TO CONSERVATION

BACKGROUND

Nature United is a Canadian conservation organization that creates solutions for people and nature by building diverse partnerships to protect lands and waters and ensure nature is the foundation of healthy communities, economies and future opportunities. We are the Canadian affiliate of the world's largest conservation organization, The Nature Conservancy (nature.org).

Nature United believes the increased authority of Indigenous peoples to steward their lands and waters results in durable and lasting solutions for people and nature over time. As such, Nature United works in partnership to support Indigenous-led conservation, which is defined and implemented by Indigenous communities, grounded in Indigenous values and perspectives, and often focuses on the interconnected issues of supporting vibrant communities, strong cultures, viable economies, and healthy ecosystems.

OUR COMMITMENTS

Nature United's global affiliate (The Nature Conservancy, nature.org) is a signatory to the *Conservation Initiative on Human Rights*, along with seven other global conservation organizations. Under the initiative, each organization has adopted a conservation and human rights framework, committing to uphold a set of human rights principles, as well as to put in place implementation measures, including relevant policies, enhanced implementation capacity and appropriate accountability mechanisms.

Indigenous rights are a distinct subset of human rights and are of particular relevance to Nature United as much of our work is in partnership with Indigenous peoples, communities and organizations. The following points seek to articulate and clarify Nature United's understanding of Indigenous rights as they relate to conservation. We recognize that the issues at the intersection of Indigenous rights and conservation are complex and nuanced. The points below capture many but not all of the issues our organization seeks to consider and/or address.

- 1. Indigenous peoples in Canada are the original inhabitants of the lands known as Canada.** They have inherent rights, affirmed through Treaty and Aboriginal Rights in the Canadian Constitution, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other sources of domestic and international law. These inherent rights include both individual and collective rights, a right to be fully consulted, and a right to self-government. As such, Indigenous peoples and communities have a special responsibility and right to manage, protect and steward their lands, territories and natural resources.
- 2. Indigenous peoples' cultures, economies, knowledge systems, languages and identities are inextricably tied to their traditional territories and natural resources.** The ecological integrity of lands and waters is essential to the unique relationships Indigenous peoples have to their traditional territories. Nature United believes that Indigenous peoples who have strong cultural ties, who are intimately connected to the lands and waters, and/or who rely on the resources for their well-being are likely to make decisions that will result in long-term sustainable resource management. Nature United believes that strong Indigenous leadership and increased Indigenous authority may lead to the development and implementation of durable decisions, agreements and frameworks related to sustainable resource management and conservation.
- 3. Nature United seeks to work in partnership with Indigenous peoples and their communities where shared interests exist,** in order to manage and protect ecosystems;

increase the leadership and authority of Indigenous peoples to manage and govern their resources; build sustainable local economies; and other conservation efforts. Our organization works to develop partnerships that are based on mutual respect, equality, open dialogue, integrity and mutual accountability, as we believe these are fundamental principles of enduring, effective and mutually beneficial relationships. (*For more information, see Nature United's "Guidance for Building Partnerships with Indigenous Peoples."*)

4. **Nature United believes it is our responsibility to ensure that we have the organizational capacity and competencies** to understand the links between Indigenous rights and conservation. As such, we are committed to building internal capacity across all professional disciplines, as well as engaging our staff, Board of Directors, funders and others in deep and ongoing training.
5. **Nature United seeks to address Indigenous rights in the design, implementation and monitoring of all of our projects.** In many cases, this means direct partnerships with Indigenous peoples and their communities. In other cases, it may mean conducting an impact assessment of our projects or activities to understand the implications for Indigenous rights, to ensure that the design and implementation of the project reflects local issues, and to commit to ongoing monitoring and adaptions so we continue to work respectfully and integrate indigenous rights to the greatest extent possible.
6. **Nature United advocates that a human rights-based approach with particular attention to respecting and integrating Indigenous rights** be adopted in our joint work with other conservation and non-profit organizations, communities, and public- or private-sector partners.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Claire Hutton, Indigenous Stewardship Director, chutton@natureunited.ca
natureunited.ca/IndigenousLed